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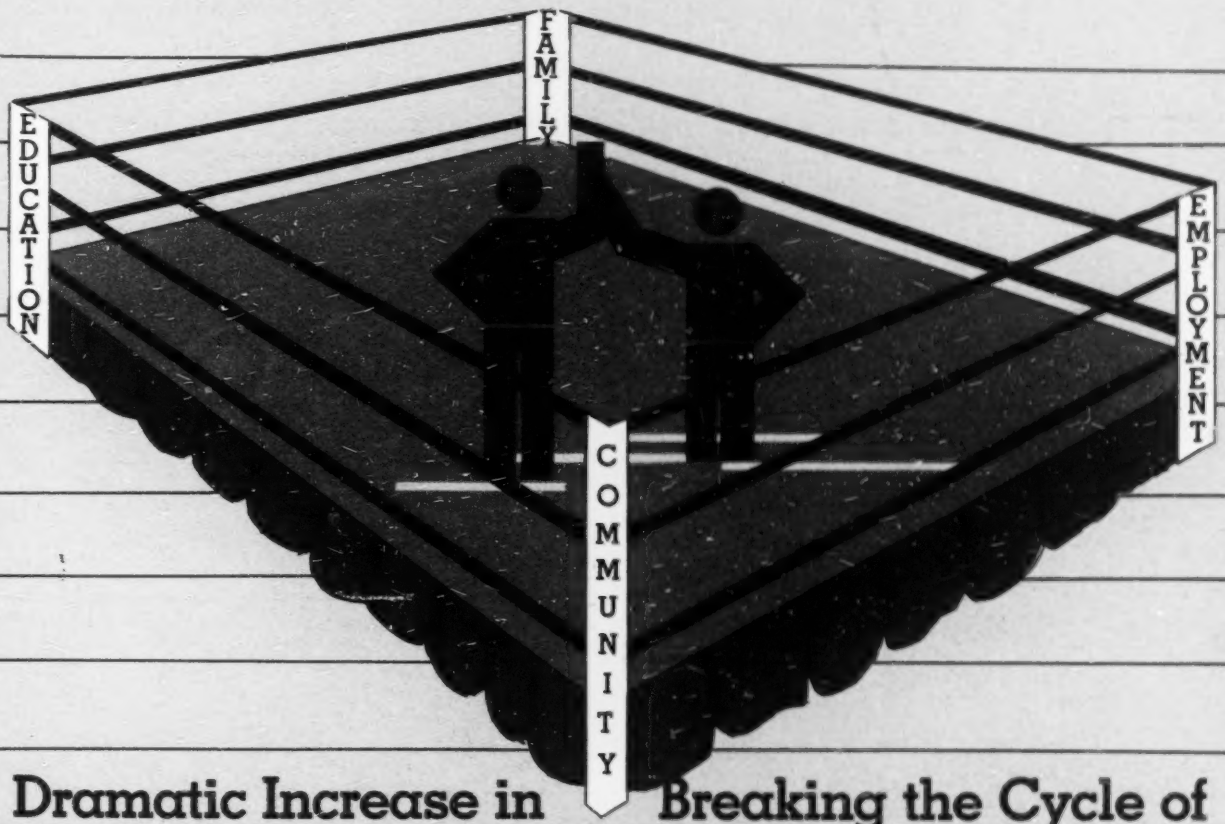
FOCUS

A Fighting Chance for Black Youth

Creative remedies can reverse bleak trends.



Dramatic Increase in Single Black Mothers

Why is it happening?

Breaking the Cycle of Educational Failure

Can standardized tests help?

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Joint Center for Political Studies

Perspective

In this issue of *Focus*, three prominent scholars, Bernard Gifford and Jewelle Taylor Gibbs of the University of California at Berkeley and William P. O'Hare, senior research associate at the Joint Center, describe several of the most troubling social problems facing blacks today and propose some old and new solutions.

One common theme runs through all of their articles, namely, the need to apply more of this nation's political, economic, and institutional resources toward strengthening the black family and helping to prepare black youth for productive and fulfilling lives. They also point to self-help strategies that blacks themselves must pursue.

There are no easy answers to these challenges, of course, but before we can even begin to suggest solutions, we must first define the dimensions of the problem. One of the clearest definitions I have seen was published in 1983 by thirty prominent black scholars who met in Tarrytown, New York, to explore the vast array of problems black Americans face in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In their essay, *A Policy Framework for Racial Justice*, which was published by the Joint Center and discussed in *Focus* (June 1983), they said:

> Accumulated social and economic pressures, feeding upon the long-standing effects of American racism, have produced a special crisis for the black family today. This crisis underlies many problems facing the black community, especially entrenched poverty, which is closely correlated to the pronounced vulnerability of the large and growing number of black families headed by single mothers. No strategy designed to improved the status of black Americans can ignore the central position of the black family as the natural transmitter of the care, values, and opportunities necessary for [blacks] . . . to reach their full potential as individuals.

Since the publication of *A Policy Framework*, the status of the black family has once again become a major concern of black Americans and the entire nation. This comes about almost two decades after Daniel Patrick Moynihan's controversial report on the condition of the black family and President Lyndon Johnson's speech at Howard University warning the nation that grave problems in black family structure threatened black advancement.

Such continuing concern is not misplaced, although it has not been heeded in the past to any significant degree. The rate at which black female-headed families are being added to the population increased dramatically between 1970 and 1980, averaging about 92,000 per year, but the increase since 1980 has been staggering, averaging about 167,000 per year. Among whites, the pattern contrasts sharply, with an average of 179,000 additional female-headed families each year between 1970 and 1980; but between 1980 and 1984, the average declined to 161,000 a year. Even though there are about nine times as many whites as blacks in the country, more black than white female-headed households are now being added each year.

The reason for these patterns also is significant. Among blacks, the increase results almost entirely from an increase in births, whereas for whites, female-headed households are primarily the result of separation and divorce.

The sharp differences between blacks and whites in the incidence of female-headed households is probably reflected most dramatically in the living arrangements of children. In 1984, 50.2 percent of black children lived in female-headed households compared with only 14.3 percent of white children, and the overwhelming majority were poor.

What is the problem, we ask. Is it poor education or unemployment, inadequate housing or racism? It is all of the above, and more. The problem is an insidious form of structural discrimination in my view, when you can't get a good job because you couldn't get a good education because you lived in a poor neighborhood because your family didn't earn enough money to do any better.

Solving the problem of structural discrimination requires a far more comprehensive approach than has been made yet. We must go beyond piecemeal approaches and start looking at the whole picture, to come up with comprehensive solutions.

Hopefully, today's renewed concern about the plight of the black family will lead us in this direction.

Eddie N. Williams
President

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Dramatic Increase in Single Black Mothers

by William P. O'Hare

(The author is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.)

Recent statistics reveal that the number of black families headed by women is now growing far more quickly than it did in the 1970s but for different reasons. Since black female-headed families are three times as likely to be poor as black married-couple families, the rapid growth in the number of black female-headed families has serious economic ramifications for the black community. Details of recent changes and three popular explanations for them are briefly discussed below.

Recent Changes in Black Female-Headed Families

Between 1970 and 1980, the number of black families headed by women increased by an average of about 92,000 each year; between 1980 and 1984, however, the number of black families headed by women increased by 167,000 per year.

The numbers were not the only thing that changed. The causes of the growth changed, too. Female-headed families are created in one of three ways: (1) a married couple with children break up and the mother retains custody of the children; (2) a woman has a child out of wedlock; or (3) a woman with a child is widowed. Relatively few female-headed households are the result of widowhood. Divorce and births out of wedlock are the primary mechanisms by which female-headed families are created.

Among blacks during the 1970s, out-of-wedlock births were about equal to divorce and separation in causing the increased number of families headed by women. Out-of-wedlock births accounted for 49,200 new families each year, while divorces accounted for 40,200. The number accounted for by widowhood was about 2,600.

Between 1980 and 1984, however, those rates changed dramatically. The number of black families headed by a separated or divorced woman increased by an average 11,500 a year, and that increase was counterbalanced by an equivalent drop of about 11,500 a year in the number of families headed by a widow. But the number of black families headed by women who had never married increased by an average of about 167,000 each year. In other words, the enormous increase in the number of black female-headed families in the early 1980s was almost entirely due to out-of-wedlock births.

Why Are Black Female-Headed Families Changing?

Several reasons for the increasing numbers of out-of-wedlock births among black women have been advanced. Three of the more popular ones can be labeled the welfare trap, changes in social norms, and the economics of marriage.

The first reason—the welfare trap—has been put forward for many years by both liberals and conservatives. Both groups argue that welfare policies are at least partly responsible for the increasing number of female-headed households, but they disagree on how the policies operate. Conservatives claim that the availability of benefits encourages young women to have babies out of wedlock in order to gain economic independence; liberals contend that since welfare policies withhold benefits from intact families, men are encouraged to abandon their families so their wives and children will be eligible for welfare assistance.

However, recent evidence suggests that the relationship between welfare policies and the increasing number of female-headed households is weak. If the availability of benefits really encouraged single motherhood, we would expect to find the highest proportion of female-headed families in the states with higher welfare benefits, and the smallest proportion of female-headed families in the states with lower benefits. But a study by Harvard researchers David Ellwood and Mary Jo Bane shows that states that provide relatively low levels of welfare benefits are just as likely to have a high level of female-headed families as states that provide high levels of welfare benefits. For example, the proportion of families headed by women is higher in Mississippi (16.0 percent) than in California (14.8 percent), even though Mississippi provides the lowest level of welfare benefits of any state and California provides one of the highest.

Furthermore, since the level of welfare benefits available to female-headed families fell 22 percent in real terms between 1972 and 1984, the power of that lure—if it is one—is clearly decreasing.

The second reason offered for the growth in the number of out-of-wedlock births is that social norms have changed: out-of-wedlock sex, pregnancy, and childbirth have become socially acceptable. In many neighborhoods, it is argued, out-of-wedlock births have become the rule, whereas a generation or two earlier, they were the exception. For many analysts, however, this argument seems circular because the evidence that social norms have changed is precisely the increase in out-of-wedlock births.

The third reason, often called the "economics of marriage," focuses attention on the dire economic circumstances of many black men—those who are unemployed and have slim prospects for future employment. Such men, according to this explanation, have very few of the economic resources necessary for supporting a family and therefore have little chance of attracting a wife. The dearth of marriageable black men is increasingly seen as a major factor in the growing number of black families headed by single women (see "A Fighting Chance for Black Youth," by Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, in this issue of *Focus*).

In short, the number of black female-headed households is growing even more quickly than it did in previous decades, but for different causes. The number of female-headed families created by separation, divorce, or widowhood is declining, and the number created by out-of-wedlock births is growing. That much is clear. But the reasons for the phenomenon are not yet fully understood, nor—more importantly—do we know what to do about it. Since the trend points to added hardships for black families, and particularly black children, it is imperative that we continue our search for answers that can be used to develop constructive policies and programs. ■

A Fighting Chance for Black Youth

by Jewelle Taylor Gibbs

(The author is acting associate professor, School of Social Welfare, University of California at Berkeley. This article is based on a speech she gave in New York City on May 16, 1985, at the Annual Civil Rights Institute, sponsored by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.)

Most of us are familiar with the problems black youth are having today, since many of those problems have been present in the black community for decades. But now those problems seem to be increasing and, at the same time, are aggravating a newer one: the problem of black families headed by young women, a large percentage of whom are trapped in poverty.

I will briefly review the "traditional" problems of black youth, will then sketch in the dimensions of the more recent problem of the growing numbers of families headed by women, and will relate the old problems to the new one. Finally, I will offer some solutions. If current trends are to be reversed, the critical areas to address are education, employment, juvenile delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. Actions to affect education and employment depend mainly on public initiative, whereas programs to prevent juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy may be undertaken by private groups—and it is to those two latter areas that my proposals here are directed.

Lack of Education, Lack of Employment, and Delinquency

A national study of high-school students in 1975 classified 42 percent of black 17-year-olds as functional illiterates, compared with 8 percent of white 17-year-olds. In 1980, nearly 20 percent of blacks between the ages of 15 and 24 did not have a high school diploma, and many could not read at fourth-grade level.

Moreover, among black teenagers for the past 20 years, the rate of unemployment (40-50 percent) has been two to three times the rate of unemployment among white teenagers. In March 1985 the unemployment rate for blacks aged 16 to 19 was 43 percent; for whites in the same age group, it was 15 percent.

Teenagers who are out of school and out of work are more likely to become involved in crime. In 1980, black juveniles committed 51 percent of all violent crimes, yet they accounted for less than 20 percent of the youth population.

Female-Headed Families

Recently, scholars and politicians have been decrying the rise in the percentage of black households headed by women. In 1960, 22 percent of all black households were headed by women; in 1970, 28 percent; and in 1983, *42 percent.* The main causes of this increase are the relatively low rate of remarriage among divorced or widowed mothers and an epidemic of childbearing by single teenagers. Nearly one-third of all single black females have a child before the age of 20.

This trend is troublesome because, according to recent statistics, 57 percent of black female-headed households have incomes below the poverty line, compared with 31 percent of white female-headed households. Even more troubling are indications that in 1982, nearly three out of every four poor black families were headed by women.

The Marriageable Pool Index

The problems of poor education, high unemployment, and delinquency are not "male problems." Unemployment, in fact, is even more prevalent among black women than among black men. But those problems affect men and women differently. They keep men from assuming the responsibilities of parenthood, whereas no matter what, if a woman becomes pregnant and decides to keep her baby, she has no choice but to assume the responsibilities of parenthood.

Sociologists William Wilson and Kathryn Neckerman of the University of Chicago recently analyzed the relationship between some of the problems of black youth and the increase in the number of households headed by black women, and presented their findings in a paper entitled "Poverty and Family Structure: The Widening Gap between Evidence and Public Policy Issues." After examining demographic trends in employment and in family patterns since before World War II, they concluded that the increase in the number of black female-headed households is strongly associated with the deteriorating participation of black men in the labor market. For example, the participation rate of black men in the labor force declined from 84 percent in 1940 to 67 percent in 1980. This decline was especially dramatic among black men aged 18 to 19: their participation in the labor force fell from 75.7 percent in 1955 to 50.2 percent in 1983. Among 20-to 24-year-old black men, the labor force participation rate also declined, from 88.5 percent in 1940 to 73.5 percent in 1980.

Wilson and Neckerman devised a "marriageable pool index," which is the ratio of employed single civilian men to single women of the same race and age. If black males between the ages of 16 and 24 who are unemployed or incarcerated are subtracted from the black male population, the index shows that from 1960 to 1982 the ratio of black males to black females sharply declined. For example, in the 20- to 24-year-old age group, Wilson and Neckerman estimated that in 1982 there were only 47 employed single black men for every 100 single black women—down from 69 for every 100 in 1960. If we look at the 25- to 34-year-old age group, the corresponding figures were 59 employed single black men for every 100 single black women in 1982—down from 68 for every 100 in 1960. Thus, for blacks in the 20- to 34-year-old range, which is the prime period for marriage and family formation in the United States, the ratio of marriageable men to single women has become very unfavorable. The proportion of young black men who are eligible to support a family has declined absolutely over the long term.

Inability to support a family, however, does not mean unwillingness to father children. Greater numbers of young black men may be unable or unwilling to marry and support a family, but sexual activity does not decline on that account. Wilson and Neckerman thus make a compelling argument that the shortage of young black marriageable men strongly contributes to the increase in out-of-wedlock births. In other words, the exacerbation of the "traditional" problems and the development of the new problem are interconnected.

Although much of the concern about the increasing incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancy has appropriately focused on the plight of the unwed teenage mother, we also need to consider the traditional problems faced by many black teenage fathers—not only their poor education and low levels of employment, but also their high rates of delinquency and crime. These problems must be addressed and, in addition, measures must be taken to encourage sexual responsibility so that young adult black males will be able to function effectively as heads of households.

To Reduce Delinquency and Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Several studies have shown that links exist between lack of education and low levels of employment, on the one hand, and juvenile delinquency and substance abuse, on the other hand. Those studies suggest that strategies to prevent delinquency and drug and alchohol abuse among black youth should be directed toward keeping teens in school and securing regular employment for those who are not in school. But several more-direct approaches might also be effective in reducing delinquency and substance abuse, if they are aimed at the appropriate target groups, are adequately financed, and are supported by a broad coalition of community groups. Such approaches might include the following:

- increasing the number of recreational, educational, and cultural facilities and programs in inner-city neighborhoods after school and on weekends, with black churches encouraged to donate their facilities and enlist their retired members as volunteer tutors, child-care workers, group leaders, and counselors;
- establishing neighborhood "watch groups" to monitor communities for suspicious or criminal behavior, with anonymous "hot lines" for reporting drug dealers and other illegal activities;
- involving black youth in community clean-up campaigns, escort services for the elderly, and other constructive alternatives to lounging on street corners;
- providing comprehensive services for black teenagers who are truants or runaways, are emotionally disturbed, or are from "multiproblem families";
- introducing educational programs on drug and alcohol abuse in inner-city elementary schools, with peer counseling, parental involvement, and cooperation among schools, social agencies, and the juvenile justice system;
- increasing funding for, or preventing cutbacks in, the prevention and rehabilitation projects authorized by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act; significant features to prevent delinquency are also included in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

To Prevent Teenage Parenthood

Reducing the levels of delinquency and substance abuse may be an indirect way to decrease the number of pregnancies among unmarried teenage girls. Direct efforts are also being made, but most of them are aimed at adolescent females. Equally imperative is the need to focus attention on young black males. Males who become fathers during their teens are more likely to complete fewer years of schooling, achieve a lower occupational status, earn lower wages, and have more spells of unemployment than their peers who do not father children. Preventive and early intervention strategies might include—

- Sex education programs in grades K-12 that provide accurate and appropriate information to males as well as females. The Family Life Education Program recently approved by the New York State Department of Education provides a flexible curriculum that can be adapted to local community needs, values, and interests. Early indications are that in districts where this program has been implemented, teenage pregnancy rates have dropped.
- Adolescent health clinics, which provide comprehensive health care and family planning and contraceptive services that are easily accessible and, if not free, very inexpensive. School-based clinics (such as those in St. Paul, Minn.) and community-based clinics (such as the Young Adult Clinic at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City) offer innovative and flexible services that include health education, outreach, and counseling. Such programs have been effective in reducing pregnancy rates.
- Peer counseling about sexual attitudes and behavior in youth groups, such as the Boy Scouts and Boys' Clubs. One demonstration project in a black church in Washington, D.C., pairs adult males (who serve as counselors and role models) and young males from the same neighborhood, with the goal of delaying sexual activity and promoting sexual responsibility.
- Educational and career counseling that emphasizes achievement, career aspirations, and personal "fate control," since studies have shown a relationship between these factors and female adolescents' decisions to delay sexual activity. Programs such as Choices, developed by the Girls' Club of America, and the Life Planning Curriculum developed by the Center for Population Options in Washington, D.C., address the interrelationship between sexual decision-making, personal values and behaviors, and future vocational options.
- Teen parenting programs that encourage the participation of teenage fathers as well as mothers. This increases fathers' involvement with their children and helps them develop a sense of shared responsibility for their children's welfare. The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program sponsored by the San Francisco General Hospital offers comprehensive services to teen fathers, including counseling, job referral, and follow-up support services.
- Community awareness projects that try to redirect the values of black teenagers so that they will engage less in early sexual experimentation and focus more on education, acquisition of skills through part-time work or volunteer activities, and constructive recreational and social activities. Black churches and community groups could cooperate with the Children's Defense Fund in the fund's nationwide efforts to encourage black youth to delay sexual activity and to prevent teenage pregnancy.

In 20 years, the young men and women of today, black and white, are the people our country will be depending on to assume adult leadership responsi-

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Breaking the Cycle of Educational Failure

by Bernard R. Gifford

(The author is dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley. This article is reprinted with permission from Education Week, *Volume 4, Number 26, March 20, 1985.)*

As the use of standardized tests to screen prospective teachers spreads across the country, minority applicants are failing at a disproportionately high rate. Critics argue that the increased use of testing is inherently racist and counterproductive. But I disagree. If we devalue standardized tests, we are evading the serious issues raised by high minority failing rates—and that will only perpetuate the problems all of us are seeking to solve.

California has recently increased its reliance on testing and the state's story is instructive, reflecting the national experience. Since 1983, prospective teachers in California have been required to take the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), which evaluates *basic* skills in mathematics, reading, and writing. Candidates take the CBEST for diagnostic purposes before they can be admitted to a teacher-education program, and they must pass the exam before receiving certification. Prospective teachers who have not successfully completed an approved sequence of academic courses are also required to score above a minimum cut-off on the National Teacher Examination (NTE) in order to enter the profession.

Effects of Tests on Minorities

California's testing program, like that of other states, has received some rather harsh criticism. Among those most reluctant to endorse the growing reliance on standardized examinations are groups sensitive to the unique problems confronting prospective teachers from minority backgrounds.

The reluctance of these groups is understandable, given the tests' effects on minorities nationwide. In California, of the 6,644 minority candidates who took the first CBEST in 1983, 3,854, or 58 percent, failed. The highest failure rate was among blacks. Of the 2,040 blacks who took the exam, only 530 were able to proceed with their plans to be teachers, a paltry 26 percent. For other minority groups, the test results were not much better: only 834 (39 percent) of 2,133 Mexican-Americans and 637 (50 percent) of 1,259 Asian-Americans passed. In comparison, the passing rate for whites was 76 percent, with 18,856 of the 24,540 whites who took the exam passing.

The rates of failure on these examinations reflect two ominous trends: the decline in interest in teaching on the part of many well-educated students, especially talented minority students, and the failure of the colleges and universities to guarantee that their graduates, including many minority graduates, can read with comprehension, write literately, and perform routine mathematical computations.

The problems associated with these high minority failure rates are made all the more serious by our increasing need for qualified black, Hispanic, and Asian-American teachers at a time of rapid demographic change. A large and increasing proportion of public-school students in California and a number of other states are minority youngsters, and demographers expect this picture to continue into the next century.

If present trends continue, the supply of minority teachers will nose-dive, a result that is as disturbing as it is unacceptable. Equally serious is the prospect that when minority-group pupils, especially those contemplating teaching careers, learn that many prospective minority teachers are judged not good enough to teach, they may lose confidence in their own abilities and conclude that the teaching profession is "off limits" to minorities. Also, minority students, who desperately need to see successful role models, would be denied access, yet again, to exemplars of success.

In Support of Minimum-Competency Standards

The first reaction of many to these test results is to cry "racism." They insist that "alternative" certification standards be adopted for minority-group teaching candidates in order to take into account their different experiences and qualifications. Otherwise, the argument goes, the promises of democracy and equality will once again be placed in great jeopardy. I disagree with such a view. We must support minimum-competency standards. We must insist that *all* prospective teachers demonstrate mastery of basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Many have argued that exams like CBEST are culturally biased, heavily skewed in favor of pupils from middle-class homes. This may well be the case. But the solution is not to throw out standardized examinations. We must insist instead that every attempt be made to rid these exams of their invalid features.

We must also insist that public officials, in and out of the educational establishment, develop, fund, vigorously monitor, and evaluate school-improvement programs designed to help minority pupils become more competitive on examinations such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the CBEST. Here again, targeted programs make more sense as a means to close the performance gap between low-income and middle-income students than proposals to discontinue the SAT or CBEST. We must not accept and thereby institutionalize dual standards for minority and nonminority students.

Ensuring Qualified Minority Teachers

It is clear that we must interrupt the cycle of minority-pupil failure and take direct action to provide all students in our public schools with high-quality education that is responsive to their real needs. We cannot begin this effort without well-qualified minority teachers. To meet the challenge we face, we need to take steps to ensure a larger pool of qualified minority teachers, while also maintaining and improving standards of teacher quality.

How can we achieve this goal? The following comprehensive program, which is currently under consideration by the California state legislature, comprises my three-step plan to address this imbalance. It includes proposals for identifying early in their education minority and low-income students who have a commitment to teaching; providing these students with intensive university and post-graduate training; and instituting programs and rewards for outstanding effective teachers—nonminority as well as minority—once they are in the classroom.

As early as high school, students who have expressed interest in teaching as a career would be selected to participate in a special university-level preprofessional program. Admission considerations would include students' potential for growth and eagerness to learn in addition to the traditional criteria of grades and past achievements. Special efforts would be made to recruit students with a background or interest in areas of particular need, such as mathematics, science, or language and literacy. The program would require a five-year university course of study leading to the bachelor's degree and would provide a series of paid school-year and summer teaching internships. Interns could work for, and learn from, master or mentor teachers to the mutual benefit of both.

Upon selection, students would take a series of diagnostic tests to identify subject-area strengths and weaknesses. In conjunction with regular studies, they would then enroll in a series of tutorials to work on skill development in their weakest areas. These tutorials would be an integrated part of an undergraduate liberal-arts program leading to the bachelor's degree and would cover reading and basic mathematics, with heavy emphasis on reasoning skills and good, clear writing. At the end of two years, the students would be tested to measure their growth. A second individualized study program, again based on skill levels, would then be developed and the process intensified over the next three years.

After receiving their bachelor's degrees, students would be guaranteed admission to participating California State University or University of California Graduate School of Education programs, where they would enroll as regular students. Graduate scholarships covering student fees would be provided to all of these students with an undergraduate grade-point average of B or better. Partial tuition scholarships would be available to high-achievement students. Again, as in the first phase of this program, paid internships would be provided to all qualified students for the duration of their postgraduate teacher-training studies.

Any such effort to increase the pool of qualified minority teachers must be followed up with an equally vigorous effort to improve the placement and retention of teachers in schools with large minority populations. This means that we must work to end those "alternative teacher-selection processes" in which teachers with less experience, no advanced degrees, and lower salaries are assigned to schools with high proportions of minority and low-income pupils. To put it more bluntly, these "alternative" efforts have often resulted in pupils with the greatest needs being relegated to classes taught by inexperienced teachers who are themselves in great need of support and guidance from more experienced teachers. Moreover, while successful in increasing minority employment opportunities, alternative selection programs have in too many instances operated as restricted racial conduits, steering newly hired minority teachers whose qualifications have been earned through alternative means into almost exclusively minority schools. We cannot allow this situation to continue; it is to the detriment of all.

The third step of my program addresses the need to identify and reward good teachers after they have been in the classroom for a few years and to provide incentives for them to remain. I propose a new test as the basis for certifying outstanding individuals as "master teachers." To be taken after at least five years of full-time public-school teaching, the test would measure not only subject-matter competency but also knowledge and application of learning theory, and an ability to implement effective teaching strategies in the classroom.

The test would evaluate a teacher's professional judgment and ability to diagnose needs of students, match instruction and use of material to those needs, and evaluate pupil progress. It would not be solely a pencil-and-paper exercise; applicants would also be required to demonstrate their instructional skills in a natural setting.

This test would be to teaching what the Certified Public Accountant's examination is to accounting. It would be voluntary, leading to certification as a master-level teacher—and, therefore, to new opportunities for professional advancement. As in the case of CPA-level accountants, these master-level teachers would be compensated accordingly. The test should be available on a nationwide basis, thereby expanding the job market for master-level teachers and helping those outstanding educators who saw themselves in "dead-end" positions seek advancement beyond both district and state. Moreover, school districts using the test would be able to allocate teaching talent on a more equitable basis within their districts.

In all fairness, I must acknowledge the pain and suffering experienced by those not now armed with the knowledge and skills required to pass present minimum-competency exams. Certainly, we need to increase the number of minority teachers. But we must keep in mind that the effectiveness of our schools cannot be measured simply by statistics on the racial composition of teaching staffs. School effectiveness must be measured by statistics reflecting the mastery of basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic by all of our students.

What I have proposed here may bring a short transitional period of disappointment for some who will be locked out of teacher-training programs or certification. But the benefits will outweigh the costs; it will finally put a stop to "victim-blaming" measures that have created more problems each time they have been applied. What education needs now is not more exceptions to standards but more flexible and imaginative programs to ensure that, in more and more cases, the standards themselves can be met. Our children, our teachers, and our society deserve at least that.

A Fighting Chance . . .

(Continued from page 5)

bilities, support the social security system, manage the bureaucracy, and bring up the next generation.

Our society cannot afford to throw away or write off one-fifth of its youth. You've heard it many times before, but it's worth repeating: "Our children are our future." And there is no doubt that this nation has the political, economic, social, and personal resources to help all our children approach their full potential. But we must act now! Together, we can give black youth a fighting chance. ■

Telescope

New JCPS Publication on Minorities and the Labor Market

The Joint Center has just published a study of how minorities are affected by policies that deal with the problems of structural unemployment. *Minorities and the Labor Market: Twenty Years of Misguided Policy*, written by Richard McGahey and John Jeffries, research associates at the Urban Research Center of New York University, examines various efforts made during the past 20 years to deal with the problems of structural unemployment, from the Manpower Development and Training Act of the early 1960s through the Reagan administration's Job Training and Partnership Act. The authors also examine the specific employment problems of blacks. Their conclusion is that past approaches to structural unemployment all suffered from the same flaw: a failure to recognize that the employment problems of blacks and other minorities are different from those of white males and therefore require different solutions.

Copies of *Minorities and the Labor Market* are available from the Joint Center for $5.95 each.

Labor Force Highlights

High unemployment is one of the most insidious problems confronting black Americans. It is a problem that demands constant attention and action. Therefore, *Focus* is beginning a series of "Labor Force Highlights" to keep readers apprised of periodic changes in the unemployment and labor force participation rates.

Listed below are the unemployment and labor force participation rates of blacks and whites, by age and sex, for August 1985. The unemployment rate measures the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed. The labor force participation rate measures the percentage of the total noninstitutionalized population that is employed or seeking work. The figures below have been "seasonally adjusted"—that is, the changes in these indices that result from seasonal events have been factored out. An example of such changes is the jump in teenage participation rates caused solely by the influx into the labor force of students seeking summer employment. Seasonally adjusted rates reflect economic factors alone rather than the impact of temporary changes in the supply of labor.

Also presented below are the changes in these indices since last year and last month. The unemployment rate for blacks declined by 1.8 points over the past year, whereas the rate for whites declined by 0.2 points. The unemployment rate for blacks continues to be more than double the rate for whites. The labor force participation rate for whites increased by 0.4 points since last year, whereas for blacks it declined by 0.3 points. The increase for whites was highest among women; the decrease for blacks was highest among men.

Labor Force Statistics for the Month of August 1985

	Blacks				Whites			
Age	Total 16+	Men 20+	Women 20+	Teens 16-19	Total 16+	Men 20+	Women 20+	Teens 16-19
Unemployment Rate	14.0	11.8	13.2	34.4	6.2	5.3	5.7	15.3
Change from last year	−1.8	−2.3	−.6	−6.9	−.2	−.2	−.2	−.7
Change from last month	−1.0	−.8	0	−4.6	−.2	−.3	0	−1.0
Labor Force Participation Rate	62.3	74.2	58.0	38.8	64.8	78.3	54.0	55.9
Change from last year	−.3	−1.2	−.1	0	+.4	−.3	+.9	+.4
Change from last month	−.5	0	−.1	−3.6	−.1	+.1	+.1	+.2

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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